

JUVENILE RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

This fact sheet was developed from excerpts from the Arthritis in Children brochure of the Arthritis Foundation.

WHAT IS JUVENILE RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS (JRA)?

Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis (JRA) is the most common form of arthritis in children.

WARNING SIGNS

The signs and symptoms of JRA can vary from child to child, day to day, and even morning to afternoon. Joint pain and stiffness may be mild one day and be so severe the next that the child has trouble getting around. Muscle weakness may result from doing less due to pain. Altered use of a muscle from pain may also cause muscle weakness. The most common features are:

- joint swelling, tenderness, or pain;
- morning stiffness, inactivity stiffness;
- feeling tired or weak;
- joint limitation; and
- muscle weakness.

CAUSE

No one knows the cause of JRA. We do know that it involves abnormalities of the immune system. JRA is not contagious. Your child can not catch it from anyone and can not give it to anyone. We also know that family history plays some part in the development of several forms of arthritis. The inherited trait alone does not cause the illness. It is thought that the trait along with some other unknown factors triggers the disease.

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis is made after other conditions have been ruled out and the doctor has determined the presence of active arthritis in one or more joints for at least six weeks. To make an accurate diagnosis the doctor will:

- take a complete medical history,
- perform a medical exam
- order a series of lab test and/or x-rays (There are several lab tests that may support a diagnosis of JRA. No single test provides positive proof one way or another.)
- perform other test (joint fluid and tissue test)



Arthritis

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Early diagnosis and appropriate treatment provide children with the best possible opportunity for a favorable outcome.

TREATMENT

Your child's treatment program will be based on the kind of arthritis & symptoms. The goals of any treatment program for JRA are to:

- control inflammation
- relieve pain
- prevent or control joint damage
- maximize functional abilities

Treatment programs usually include:

- medications
- exercise
- eye care
- dental care
- healthy eating practices

Other treatment:

- surgery (may be necessary for special long term problems)

Some physicians have found that pain can be lessened by combining medical treatment with techniques such as progressive muscle relaxation, meditative breathing or guided imagery.

For more information contact:

Missouri Arthritis & Osteoporosis Program:

1-800-316-0935 or

Arthritis Foundation: 1-800-283-7800

This publication may be provided in alternative formats such as Braille, large print or audiotape by contacting 1-800-316-0935. TDD users can access the above phone number by calling 1-800-735-2966.

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